

"Gray Ghost" Again in Action, and His Shadow Falls on Home of a Family of Great Wealth.

ELIAS MANNERING rose from his place at the head of the long table. If pride shone from his still clear and penetrating eyes, it was pardonable. For he was one of the few multimillionaires in the country into whose no scandal had crept, upon whose named no agitator heaped scorn.

On each anniversary of the wedding of Elias and Rachel, his wife, the children and their children gathered in the great Westchester castle. On these occasions the women wore their more wonderful jewels, their newest gowns. Upon the table stood the famous gold service, presented to old Elias twenty years ago by an Indian potentate whose finances he had reduced to order.

The sons and grandsons and their wives vied with each other in friendly rivalry to see which one might present to Elias and Rachel the rarest present. And on this fiftieth anniversary of the marriage of the old couple their descendants had outdone themselves. Moreover, the whole world knew of these gatherings.

Just now, before Elias rose to speak, his old boy, Elias 3d, had given the names of the senders of more than 200 telegrams. A king and two presidents were among them. The sideboards were piled high with gifts from three continents. There must have been in this room the equivalent of not less than a million dollars in gold and precious stones.

Elias raised his glass. "I am going to give you a toast," he said. "You all know to whose health I shall ask you to drink." His smile seemed to caress the sweet, mild features of his wife. "But before I give that toast, I want you to join me in thanks. As I look over my life and see the prosperity and happiness that has come to me and mine, I feel that God has been very good to me."

"Too good," said a voice from the door.

NOT merely the words, nor their cynical connotation, caused the gasp of amazement from the men and the cries of fear from the women. It was the pistol in the hands of the speaker. He stood framed in the doorway, long and lean, thin-lipped and cruel-eyed. Even as Elias 3d, an ex-aviator and football player, kicked his chair from under him, the intruder crossed the threshold. Behind him came half a dozen men, each armed and menacing.

The butler, French and excitable, dropped a bottle of wine to the floor. Its loud explosion galvanized into activity the butler's four assistants. Weller, stocky and active, leaped at the intruder; Pelham caught him full in the chest, and he went sprawling to the floor. Johnson, older than Weller, threw a silver tray on which were coffee cups. The liquid damaged only a priceless tapestry. A shot from another of the bandits sent Johnson to join Weller. Elias 3d, a yard from one of the bandits, went down. His father's cry of agony was cut short by a fourth bullet.

Before this merciless attack the others hesitated.

Old Elias, his face ashen with grief, not fear, faced the intruders. "What do you want?" he cried.

"What do you think we want?" jeered the lean leader. "Everything you have, old fossil."

The French butler sprang forward, but the leader easily evaded him. The butler went sprawling upon the floor. One of the bandits bent over and his pistol muzzle crashed upon the butler's forehead. He crumpled into unconsciousness.

The leader walked to the side of old Elias. Threatening the old man with his weapon, he ordered the women to strip off their rings and necklaces.

"I forbid you to—" cried old Elias. Outrageous pride made him give the order.

Caliously the leader struck the host. The old man fell across the table. The two remaining servants were shot down without compunction. And when Elias' grandsons would have continued the unequal struggle, their wives and mothers and their white-faced grandmother restrained them.

Within forty minutes after their arrival the bandits had departed, taking with them, in sacks, the gold plate, the jewels of the women, and certain ornaments from the drawing rooms and chambers upstairs. Behind them lay two dead men, six badly wounded men, and a dozen hysterical women. All the unwounded were tied, bound and gagged.

A similar situation obtained in the servants' hall. Outside in the garage and stable were men who struggled vainly at their bonds or roared from the pain of injuries. And in the lunge at the gates of the estate lay another dead man, above whose body, in a great cage, chattered indignant a green and yellow parrot.

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Pelham looked at the butler. "I just wanted to get all the facts in the shortest possible time," explained Tryon. "I think we can talk to some of the family now."

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THEY were there when the coroner examined the servants and members of the family. Tryon conveyed a hint to the coroner which caused that worthy to refrain from asking personal questions of the servants. So that the only new bit of information the two detectives acquired was to the effect that the huge touring car which supposedly had been used by the bandits had been overturned in a ditch a couple of miles from the lodge gates, and abandoned.

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Pelham promised to keep the old man in touch with each development as it occurred, and then he and Tryon left the room.

Downstairs they met the village chief of police, a surprisingly alert individual.

"I've got all the servants lined up in the hall, gentlemen," he said. "I want you to get them, their stories."

"Well, I know that the lodge keeper was murdered by some one whom he took to be a friend. The newspapers told us that the car containing the bandits was admitted by the lodge keeper."

"The papers said nothing of the sort," exclaimed Tryon.

Pelham grinned. "The papers said that the bandits arrived in an automobile and departed in one. Now, it's obvious that the lodge keeper would not have admitted a party of strangers. There is a telephone in the lodge. Before unlocking the gates to strangers, especially late at night, the keeper would have phoned the house. And quite obviously he didn't telephone, because no one, servants or family, knew that a car was coming up the drive. At least no one has mentioned knowing it."

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"Good work," said Pelham. He turned to Tryon. "Suppose, Jerry, that you have a talk with them, while I look around outside. I want to go down to the lodge."

"All right," agreed Tryon. He followed the chief to the servants' hall in the rear of the house, while Pelham walked out the front door.

For a moment Pelham drank in the beauty of the scene, the well-kept lawns and trees, the beautiful pool hidden by shrubbery, the river and the hills. Then he walked down the drive up which they had come a few moments before.

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To road ran in and out between lawns and flower beds and avenues of trees, until a half mile from the castle, one arrived at the lodge and the great gates that barred the public from the grounds. These gates had been opened by a village constable upon the arrival of Pelham and Tryon, and the man had closed them after their car passed through. Pelham noted the great high walls which enclosed the grounds; he nodded, pursed his lips and approached the lodge keeper.

The constable, already informed of his identity, admitted him without question.

It was a quaint, ivy-covered building, with but two rooms on the ground floor and three on the second. A small hall admitted one to the living and dining room. Pelham paused on the threshold, his attention attracted at once to a green and yellow parrot, chattering upon his perch in a great cage that hung from the ceiling. The bird's words were indistinguishable.

"'Illimore,'" it seemed to say. And it shrieked the word over and over again, pushing its great beak between the bars of the cage, crying Pelham malignantly, and shaking the cage in the manifestation of what was either wrath or terror.

Pelham looked at the bird. It could only talk. As though in an-

"'Who's parroging me?'"

"Manning," replied Tryon. "Of people, as you and I are the only ones that ever got anything on the Gray Ghost, the New York police will help us in every way, but it's a private job. Fifty thousand retainer, fifty thousand if we get the men who committed the robbery, one hundred thousand for the return of the stolen property, and a half million for the Gray Ghost himself."

Pelham whistled. "Manning must believe in the Gray Ghost."

Tryon colored. "Every one does now. I don't know why I was head enough ever to believe that he was dead. But old Manning had me on the phone at my house before breakfast. His doctors called me up and told me that he was in no shape to talk, but insisted on doing so. The old boy's voice was certainly feeble, but his spirit isn't. He's mad clean through, and his bank roll is behind us. That interest you?"

"Lots," replied Pelham. "But it doesn't interest me as much as the mere fact that we have another chance at the Gray Ghost. Let's go."

They made their way downstairs to Tryon's waiting limousine. They were an oddly assorted pair. Jerry Tryon was the typical policeman, stockily built, heavy-footed, possessed of great physical strength and with an amazing tenacity of purpose. Pelham, thin, tall, and restless-seeming, looked the imaginative person that he was. At a casual glance one would have taken Pelham to be the planner and Tryon the doer, but Pelham's imagination was combined with executive ability.

That executive ability had gone to waste during most of his life, but the recent renaissance of the Gray Ghost had caused Pelham, at the moment facing impoverishment, to accept the offer of Tryon to join his organization. Tryon had made such offers repeatedly, but the younger man had refused, feeling that he was made out of gratitude for old favors. But almost by accident Pelham had discovered that he possessed the detective instinct.

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THEY talked of other things during their hour-long ride to the Manning estate. Both of them wished to arrive at the scene of last night's tragic affair without too many preconceived ideas. Neither Tryon nor Pelham had ever been there before. They had come to look at a palatial home, and they found themselves in a hospital.

For doctors and trained nurses dominated the place, and the odor of anesthetics filled the air.

In his study, a round room on the second floor, they found old Elias, resting under the ministrations of medical attendants. A bandage was wound around his forehead, and his one old face was pale. Indeed, a lesser man would have been in his bed, but Elias Manning sat sturdily in a swivel chair.

Tryon was talking to one of them, the butler, as Pelham entered.

The ex-lieutenant looked at his ally. "I've got the dope up until the moment that the gang entered the dining room, Mr. Pelham," he said. "Want to question the others?"

Pelham looked at the butler. His head was bandaged, and his face was white. His snapping black eyes seemed to glow. "Suppose you tell us what happened?" suggested Pelham.

His keen red eyes rested a moment on Tryon, then shifted abruptly to the face of Pelham. "You're Pelham, aren't you?" he demanded. "The man that almost landed the Gray Ghost last month?"

Pelham smiled deprecatingly. "My friend, Mr. Tryon, did as much as I."

Tryon caressed his blue chin. "I'm a cop, Mr. Manning, and my friend is a genius. If the Gray Ghost is ever found, Pelham will find him."

"You are Frinch?" asked Pelham.

"Oui, m'sieu."

"Been employed here long?" asked Pelham.

Tryon interposed: "I have the pedigree of every one, Mr. Pelham. Unless, of course, there was something particular."

Pelham shook his head. "I just wanted to get all the facts in the shortest possible time," explained Tryon. "Any objection to the inquest taking place this afternoon, gentlemen?" he asked.

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Pelham shifted from one foot to another. "All I know, m'sieu, is that a man suddenly appeared in the door. Other men followed; there was shooting; Nex' thing the doctaire was attending me."

"Nothing beyond what we already know," replied the ex-lieutenant. "Old Elias Manning is fit to be tied. He seems to expect that detective ought to catch a guy like the Gray Ghost in ten minutes. He forgets that the Ghost has been at large for the last ten years. A fine old scoundrel, though."

Pelham shifted from one foot to another. "You just discovered that some of the servants were part of the bandit crew, eh?"

Tryon stared at his slender ally. "All right," said old Elias. "But don't leave me out of this," he ordered.

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